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## THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

## DEMOCRACY AND MORALS

IN an article by Cohen that appeared in the *New Republic*, March 17, 1920, and in the article by Sheldon in this JOURNAL, June 6, 1921, certain misrepresentations of Dewey's conception of democracy are so persistently ascribed to Dewey as to raise the question whether Cohen, Sheldon and others are really criticizing the thing to which alone Dewey applies that term, namely, *moral democracy*. Since the Revolution it has been popularly assumed—i.e., by those who do not reflect critically—that democracy means liberty, in the sense of the absence of law and social control; fraternity, in the sense of the absence of ranks and titles; and equality in the sense of equal control exercised by all alike over the material and spiritual resources of society. The readers of this JOURNAL surely do not require proof that these "ideals," taken separately, are unnatural and, taken together, are mutually incompatible. Liberty, so conceived, is incompatible with equality as defined; and since men differ by nature in taste and capacity, fraternity as conceived by the revolutionists can never be anything but an affectation. The rank of a man is indeed but the guinea's stamp, and the man's the gold; but the immortal Burns knew better than most that men differ in metal and that merely stamping them does not always make guineas.

It is difficult for any student of life to enter sympathetically and intelligently into the viewpoint and method of another, but progress in the discussion of philosophical problems depends upon our making the effort. The signers of this paper accordingly venture to say that the key to Dewey's use of the term democracy is liberty, rather than equality, but not the liberty of the revolutionists, not liberty in the merely negative sense of the absence of restraint and control. Liberty means the absence of arbitrary restraint, of unjust control: liberty is opportunity to do right: but the moral meaning of the word is, simply, opportunity for each and all to beat their music out, to live the best life they are capable of, to make the best contribution to the material and spiritual resources of society they can. When one considers what an unformed mass of possibilities each child is as it comes into the world, the applications of this realistic conception of liberty are many and clear. All the activities of science, for example, and all the social institutions that stimulate

and encourage them, are included in this conception of moral democracy. In the words of President Lowell, "Is it or is it not desirable that men in the community should yield as much intellectual output as possible? If it is, how is it undemocratic in men any more than in cows? Do not let us be deceived. Let us remember that after all the greatest asset of a community is not its mines, or its soil, but its men; and that it is for the interest of the whole community that every man should be developed to the utmost point to which he can be developed." By moral democracy, Dewey means a community in which each member finds heroic stimulation and encouragement to be and do his best. "The end, the right and only right end, of man, lies in the fullest and freest realization of powers in their appropriate objects. The good consists of friendship, family and political relations, economic utilization of mechanical resources, science, art, in all their complex and variegated forms and elements. There is no separate and rival moral good; no separate, empty and rival 'good will'" (Dewey in Dewey and Tuft's *Ethics*). "Harmony, reinforcement and expansion are the signs of a true or moral satisfaction. What is the good which while good in direct enjoyment also brings with it richer and fuller life?" Richer and fuller life includes pure science, art, worship and contemplation, the development and enjoyment of wealth, the making and administration of law, and other enterprises. This is a circular definition, of course; for this philosophy is founded in the notion of inherent value, namely in the notion of the inherent value of the experience of value. Contemplation is accordingly either good, bad or indifferent; to say that this philosophy has no place for contemplation is a misreading of it. All political activities are tested by this question: Do they tend to stimulate and develop the capacities of individuals in ways that render them available for the social good?

The good, according to this philosopher, consists of self-conserving and self-promoting activity, *i.e.*, of activity that in its results tends to reinforce and expand itself; and the similarity of this conception to a possible interpretation of the Kantian maxim is obvious. However, this abstract formula in its sweeping generality is practically useless: it gives little or no help to anyone confronted with an actual moral issue. This consideration leads to the conclusion that the real value of an act is unique, that each concrete moral situation has its own good; and this means that moral values are immediate and concrete, not abstract and conceptual. It does not mean that the good is idiosyncratic or fanciful. The good of each moral situation is as universal as an oak tree, as real as the first president of the United States.

In a moral democracy, conflicts of claim occur naturally and in-

evitably, and where they occur this ideal means that the parties concerned refer their claims to a common good and coöperate in achieving that. That Dewey recognizes the function of government in settling such conflicts is evident in page after page of his ethical discussions. Thus, he remarks that no other such instrument as the courts with their juries was ever devised for mediating social order and progress. Again, every right, civil or political, carries with it a corresponding duty and the only fundamental anarchy is the laying claim to rights without acknowledging corresponding duties. The enforcement of duties through law and its administration is abundantly provided for in this theory of society. That Dewey believes the acquisition and ownership of private property to be a moral good, no student of his ethics can question. Like most modern writers on politics he regards public judgment as a most important sanction of law, but he recognizes the usefulness and necessity of force intelligently applied.

In the light of these teachings of Dewey, so familiar that apologies are in order for reciting them, what is to be said of Cohen's statement that Dewey has deliberately chosen between the gospel of mastery over nature and mastery over self and rejected the latter? Cohen states that according to Dewey all ideas are and ought to be "instruments for reforming the world," that Dewey uses the word practical to mean tending to reform the *cosmic scenery* of human life. According to Dewey, however, the *human self* is a part of nature; a human community is as much a natural phenomenon as a community of beavers. Dewey holds that the particular part of nature that today most needs scientific treatment leading to "mastery" over it is the part that never yet has received such treatment, namely, the human community and especially the human self. He reiterates exactly the opposite of the doctrine that Cohen ascribes to him. He enforces the necessity of applying the organa of scientific intelligence to *human* nature in order that the manifold problems of politics, economics, preventive medicine, international society, *etc., etc.*, can be solved through effective self-direction. It is to the end of human self-mastery that Dewey teaches "reconstruction in philosophy." The Baconian slogan, Knowledge is Power, as interpreted by Dewey, means that before man can hope to master the social conditions (the "scenery" of Cohen) of human life, he must take the pains to study and know them adequately. As the present writers understand *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, that is the particular reconstruction the author of this book is talking about.

Cohen and Sheldon insist that Dewey teaches a gospel of equal development for all. Sheldon writes, in his discussion of Dewey's late book: "Equal development is undesirable; it would indeed be

fatal to progress. It would render society as monotonous as the desert; it would do away with the beautiful economy of the division of labor, with individuality, with unique achievement. The social democratic heaven of equal development would reduce personality to nothingness"—as if all this had any bearing on Dewey's philosophy! "We do not wish to make men equal through and through; we do not wish the ordinary man to be *capable* of doing the work of the expert; equality should pertain only to certain elementary necessities of life" (italics added). To the present writers this social philosophy contrasts violently with that of Dewey and Lowell; but it is impossible for us to understand how anyone can ascribe the dogma of equal development for all to Dewey. In his books on education he warns against the standardization of school children. The individual for Dewey has a duty to develop to the utmost his particular bent; but since it is good to grow competitively, handicaps should be removed. Unless distinction is competitively gained, both the individual and the community suffer.

Dewey writes that "regard for the happiness of others means regard for those conditions and objects which permit others freely to exercise their own powers from their own initiative, reflection and choice." Perhaps this doctrine is what Cohen and Sheldon have in mind as the doctrine of equal development for all. In Dewey's thought the socially available capacities of each should find stimulation and heroic encouragement in the "conditions and objects" that make up his social and physical environment, and he has in mind the brilliantly endowed just as much as the slow and dull. Those who have heard Dewey in the lecture room are amazed to learn that he wishes "the best endowed to put off their progress until the least endowed have come up to their level." On the contrary, he has both advocated and practised special individual training for the best endowed as well as special training for the mentally retarded.

The misreading of Dewey on the part of Cohen and Sheldon is due to a failure to understand what he means by *moral* democracy. What he teaches is not equality of possessions either material or spiritual, but equality of opportunity for each to make the best contribution to the material and spiritual life of mankind that he is capable of. Uniqueness of personal achievement is precisely the thing that Dewey does believe in, teach, and practise. That these two writers should ascribe to him exactly the opposite doctrine, that they should say he teaches a levelling process in possessions both material and spiritual, must strike every thorough reader of Dewey as strange indeed. Democracy in Dewey's conception is perfectly compatible with the meteoric achievement of a Shakspeare or a Newton: it is not incompatible with the mysticism of St. Francis or

Luther: it is not incompatible with the achievements of those modern captains of industry who have contributed enormously to the wealth of society or with their enormous rewards for doing so. The democracy he teaches is fundamentally ethical. Democracy in the sense of equal *amounts* of control over the spiritual and material resources of society, democracy in the sense of mob-rule, democracy as a levelling process, democracy in any sense that is a menace to spiritual values or to unique personal achievement, is foreign to his thought. Dewey is trying to forge an instrument that can be used effectively in the solution of personal and social problems, the objective being a community in which each man shall find encouragement to be contentedly and effectively himself.

Sheldon and Cohen both find fault with Dewey for not stating just what conditions and circumstances will environ us in that society, for not stating just what customs, laws and institutions are supremely just, beneficent and efficient. If anyone only knew! Surely the writers of these articles do not exact omniscience of the ethicist! Or demand that he teach some particular economic doctrine! Desires, inventions and changing circumstances condition in detail the organization of the community from day to day: the conflicts, competitions and triumphs of men help to determine it: and intelligence can not anticipate these in detail. "Democracy," says a writer in the *Atlantic*, "is a gamble on the reasonableness of human nature," but its method of achieving results is, within limits set by the concept of democracy itself, competitive. If human beings are essentially moral beings, as we assume they are, we must believe that all customs and institutions ought to be educative in their effects on human lives, that wealth and property ought to be subordinated to personality in our scale of values, and that every man who can ought to use his intelligence reverently and scientifically to forge a moral future out of the given present. To this end, philosophy can reasonably be expected to furnish an adequate methodology. Democracy exists only where communities daily conquer it anew, and it is part of its working *credo* that the world evolves through that effort.

This we believe to be part of Dewey's meaning, and we find it antagonistic to nothing in civilization that we habitually regard as precious. It is antagonistic to the belief that, before the determination of individual powers and individual distinction by competitive behavior, "some men are born horses while others are born with saddles to ride them." It affirms that no one should be prostituted to the status of a mere tool of another's will; for the exhortation of Kant is the acme of good sense, "Treat *humanity*, whether in thyself or another, always as an end, never as a means." In *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, an elementary presentation, Dewey emphasizes—

perhaps he overemphasizes, if measured by the standard of a complete and symmetrical system of philosophy—the instrumental theory of knowledge; but this means at most that those who study his teachings will do well to read his logical discussions in conjunction with his moral, educational and political philosophy. Whether he would subscribe to the statement, we do not know, but some of his writings suggest to us the doctrine that the inherent values to which concepts are instrumental are ultimately *inter al.* moral values.

It is not so much Dewey's philosophy as the facts of nature that negate the idea of identical development for all and the idea of equal participation in control over social resources. These facts of nature are canvassed by Dewey in various writings, and his theory squares with them. Pure science, art, worship and play are from his standpoint normal activities of human beings, human functions that certain customs of modern life tend to pervert or suppress. We hire priests to do our praying for us, professional singers to do our praising, ball teams and actors to do our playing, and scientists to do our thinking; meanwhile, we devote ourselves to a mad scramble for ability to buy things, or for a maximum of economic control, and wonder at the poverty and barrenness of all our lives. Is it "dangerous" to call attention to the fact that the spiritual enterprise of reconstructing and mastering the self is not an enterprise entirely different from that of understanding and controlling "the cosmic scenery"? Sheldon sees fit to warn his readers because Dewey has been studied and quoted by malcontents. The implications of the warning are obvious to all who cherish the wisdom of Amos and Socrates, and a solution of the question of the method of determining the dangerous or safe quality of moral ideas can not be reached in a summary fashion. The way of Dewey is to appeal to the process of history and the long-run confirmation of ideas by consequences. In his social philosophy Sheldon appears to favor medieval realism and the logic of formal authority and the Index.

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#### DR. A. N. WHITEHEAD'S SCIENTIFIC REALISM

"A N-ism," it has been well said, "is by its inmost being always in opposition," and the conditions which have governed the development of current realism have undoubtedly given it, for good or evil, a markedly protestant character; but the question whether the defects of this general attitude outweigh its merits must here be dismissed with the remark that not the least hostile influence oppos-